

## Michigan's Reading First Executive Summary

As America enters the 21<sup>st</sup> Century full of hope and promise, studies show that too many of our most needy students are being left behind.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, today, nearly 70 percent of inner city fourth graders are unable to read at a basic level on national reading tests. And nearly a third of our college freshmen find they must take a remedial course before they are able to even begin regular college level courses. Since 1965, when the federal government embarked on its first major elementary-secondary education initiative, federal policy has strongly influenced America's schools. Over the years Congress has created hundreds of programs intended to address problems in education without asking whether or not the programs produce results or knowing their impact on local needs. This "program for every problem" solution has begun to add up -- so much so that there are hundreds of education programs spread across 39 federal agencies at a cost of \$120 billion a year. Yet, after spending billions of dollars on education, we have fallen short in meeting our goals for educational excellence. The academic achievement gap between rich and poor, Anglo and minority is not only wide, but in some cases is growing wider still. (See the U.S. Dept of Education website at [www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov).)

With the passage of *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, Title I, Part B, Subpart 1, Reading First, the federal government is saying that there are no excuses. A basic premise of Reading First is that all of America's children can learn to read well by the end of third grade when given instruction that is tailored to their needs. In Reading First, federal dollars must now be spent on effective, research based programs and practices. Funds will be targeted to improve student achievement and enhance teacher quality through extensive professional development. This legislation is part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) signed into law on January 8, 2002.

Reading First focuses more directly on classroom instruction than previous federal efforts. It acknowledges that the most important venue for early readers is the early elementary classroom, and therefore, it is in the classroom where the program will build and support a reading foundation. Reading First does not aim to remediate small subgroups of children in a pull-out program or to provide instruction in any setting outside the main classroom environment. It seeks to embed the essential components of reading instruction into all elements of the primary, mainstream K-3 classrooms.

- The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* was signed by President Bush on January 8, 2002, establishing Reading First as a new, high-quality evidence-based program for the students of America
- The Reading First initiative builds on the findings of years of scientific research which, at the request of Congress, were compiled by the National Reading Panel
- Ensuring that all children receive effective reading instruction in the early grades is of critical importance to the President and the nation
- Reading First is a formula grant to states based on the number of children aged 5 to 17 from families with incomes below the poverty line
- Michigan is eligible to receive \$28.4 million dollars per year for up to 6 years

Reading First requires implementation of a competitive grant process to eligible districts for the purpose of providing professional development to all kindergarten through grade three classroom teachers and all kindergarten through grade twelve special education teachers. This professional development must provide information on the five essential components of reading instruction: phonemic awareness, explicit phonics, vocabulary instruction, oral reading fluency, and comprehension instruction. In addition, this legislation requires that states provide assistance to eligible districts on the selection and use of materials, programs, strategies, and instruction that are based on scientifically based reading research.

Eligible applicants include local education agencies (LEAs) that first of all have the highest numbers or percentages of students in kindergarten through third grade reading below grade level as determined by 4<sup>th</sup> grade MEAP reading scores. Eligible districts must meet the following criteria:

- Have 40% or more students, or 50 or more students failing the MEAP in the low category on the 4<sup>th</sup> grade Reading test; **and** additionally have **one** of the following:
- 15% or more, or 1,000 or more students from families with incomes below the poverty line; **or**
- Location in a geographic area designated as an Empowerment Zone or Enterprise Community; **or**
- 50% or more, or 8 or more buildings in school improvement status for reading.

While this legislation targets large urban areas with high poverty and high numbers of children who are failing, ESEA stipulates that states must also make public school academies and rural districts eligible as well. In addition, states must ensure that award amounts to LEAs must be of sufficient size and scope to do the job. If funds are spread too thinly across the state, no one will have an adequate amount to make an impact on children's achievement.

Even though targeted buildings will receive intensive assistance, teachers across the state will also benefit from Reading First funds. As a result of stipulations in another section of the Reading First Final Guidance, states are required to provide professional development in the five essential components of reading instruction to all in service and pre service teachers. American teachers must understand how to use assessment to inform instruction, and how to use the assessment data to plan for instruction for **all** children including English language learners, struggling readers, children with disabilities, and children from all major racial and ethnic populations. Michigan will be providing training for teachers across the state through the Regional Literacy Training Centers.

In addition, the ESEA legislation requires states to review the course content of reading courses offered by institutions of higher education teacher preparation programs. The review must examine whether the courses address the five essential components of reading instruction, prepare a report for the Reading First Management Team, the Reading Leadership Team, post the report on the Internet, and submit annual reports to the U.S. Department of Education. The purpose of this review is to ensure that all teacher candidates are also prepared to teach reading to all students. (See the Reading First Final Guidance at [www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/readingfirst](http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/readingfirst))

The following resources will provide you with further information about Reading First and the five essential components of reading:

Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA) (2001) Put Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read. Washington DC. National Institute for Literacy (1-800-228-8813) Free.

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2000). Report of the National Reading Panel, Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction. Washington, DC: NICHD. (1-800-228-8813) Free.

Snow, Burns & Griffin (Eds.) (1998). Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children. Washington DC: National Academy Press.

For further information, consult the Michigan Department of Education website at [www.michigan.gov/mde](http://www.michigan.gov/mde), or contact Faith Stevens at 517-241-2479 or [stevensf@michigan.gov](mailto:stevensf@michigan.gov).